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UNCLAS LUANDA 000250

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DEPT FOR AF/S DMOZENA AND JMALONEY

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [AO](#)

SUBJECT: ANGOLA: RUMORS FLY ABOUT LUANDA

1) Summary: Over the weekend of March 10-11, 2006, rumors circulated around Luanda encouraging Angolans to stay in their homes because of possible instability on the streets. Emboffs saw no evidence of instability or violence - only streets atypically empty of the usual Friday night movement. End Summary.

2) In a classic example of the party game where one person makes a statement to the person next to him and the message is transmitted around the circle, with permutations along the way, an explosion of phone call messages were relayed around Luanda on Friday night, March 10, 2006. Early in the evening, many Angolans and some expats reported receiving phone calls from friends recommending they stay indoors Friday night because, "something was going to happen." By the end of the evening, rumors had escalated dramatically: some said there had been a coup attempt, a prison escape, suicide and even murder of a former high ranking official. Further, there were reports that troops were patrolling the streets of Luanda. These rumors were fueled by the absence of President dos Santos (on a long planned private trip to Dubai) and Prime Minister Fernando da Piedad Dias dos Santos "Nando," (attending the inauguration of Portuguese President Cavaco Silva) and the dismissal and on-going GRA investigation into "grave allegations" against General Miala, former head of the External Security Service.

3) Embassy Luanda can only confirm the streets were atypically deserted for a Friday evening. Emboffs driving around Luanda between 8 PM and 3 AM saw no military forces or even additional police forces on the streets. We could also find no Angolan contacts with first-hand knowledge of any troop movements or direct knowledge of aborted coup attempts. While there are announced changes in the government because of the recent death of Interior Minister Van Dunem and unconfirmed reports of a cabinet shakeup following the arrest of General Miala, we have not seen signs of unrest and discordance in the government or military which would indicate a coup in the making. At the same time, we cannot explain how these weekend rumors began. Note: Van Dunem's successor, Roberto Leal Monteiro Ngongo, former Angolan Ambassador to Russia, was sworn in this morning, March 15, 2006. End Note.

4) Many emboffs received an automated text message on Saturday evening, March 11, 2006. In Portuguese, the message stated, 'Angola has a strong leadership which secured the peace and is now reconstructing the country. The armed forces and the national police strongly support the leadership and constitutional order.' We believe the message was sent by the national police leadership to reassure residents of continued political stability in Angola in the wake of the rumors. Text messages are widely used in Angola and the major cell phone providers often send mass messages celebrating national holidays or promoting services. However the content of this message was not typical of a mass text message.

5) President dos Santos returned to Luanda on Sunday, March 12, as previously planned. An extraordinary Council of Ministers meeting is being held today, March 15, 2006. The publicly announced agenda falls into line with usual Council agendas: review of the social and economic programs under progress in Angola.

6) Comment: In general, Angolans enjoy conspiracy theories and rumors often float around Luanda. However, it is worth noting that having lived through 27 years of civil war, many Angolans remain wary of potential instability. End comment.
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